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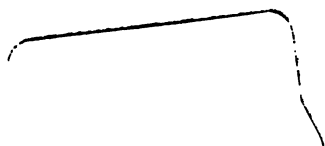
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THE REVELATION OF
THE SEVEN LAST WORDS



J. H. LESTER





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**The Revelation of the
Seven Words from the Cross.**

The Revelation
of the
Seven Words from the
Cross.

A SERIES OF ADDRESSES.

BY THE REV.

J. H. LESTER, M.A.,

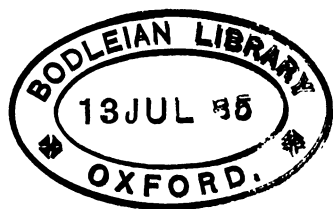
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The Revelation
of the
Seven Words from the
Cross.

The Revelation.

Introductory.

PSALM XXXIX. 4.

“MY HEART WAS HOT WITHIN ME, AND WHILE I WAS
THUS MUSING THE FIRE KINDLED, AND AT THE LAST I
SPAKE WITH MY TONGUE.”

THOUGHTS are expressed in words ; and there are times when heart and mind are stirred with a deep emotion, and the broken utterances of the lips become the spontaneous expression of the hidden power which absorbs and controls the soul.

What, then, is the meaning of the words of the dying Redeemer ? For surely no human heart was ever moved as the heart of the Man of Sorrows in the last tragedy of the Sacred Life !

Those broken sayings were not the result of an over-pressure of intense agony; nor mere expressions of sympathy with the laws of human life: they were a revelation.

The Passion was a destined work of sacred toil and not a chance accident. Just as the manifestation of the Incarnate Word is the central point in the world's history, to which, through long ages, the work of preparation tended, and from which the work of human restoration has spread; so the Passion of our Redeemer is the meeting point of His historical life of human example and His eternal life of intercession—of His Incarnate life under the limitation of a humanity not yet reconciled, and His glorified life of unlimited power, and consequently of infinite possibility for mankind. "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straightened till it be accomplished!" were His words before He went to die. Afterwards He says: "All power is given to Me in Heaven and in earth: . . . lo! I am with you always." Hence the Passion is an act in which the fundamental truths of salvation are centred—an act of intense and universal interest to the Redeemed.

It is the act which underlies all the missionary advance of the Church, for, as her Evangelists go forth with the Word of God, it is under the preaching of the Cross that souls have ever been subdued to the Empire of Jesus Christ, and filled with a loyal enthusiasm for the Kingdom of God.

Look at its place in the Christian year. What does Lent, with its solemn penitential teachings, mean, but that it is the Church calling her sons and daughters to look at sin according to the true estimate formed of it in the Passion of the Redeemer? And, as Lent deepens into Passion-tide, hearts saddened by the realization of faults and failings—sins against the love and grace of God—are led to gaze upon the atoning sacrifice with its wonderful revelations, and to enter into the power of the Precious Blood. Then Easter morning breaks with gladness, not because of the close of a season of restriction from the world, but because of a realization of holy joy and blessed freedom in communion with the risen Lord. Thus penitence issues in a real advance in newness of life; but the point of transition is at the Cross.

And how wonderful are the memories of the day of the crucifixion ! Then the solemnity of a day of death is upon us, and the heart of Christendom is hushed in sympathy with her Lord. While sin remains the stern, dark fact of human life, this day will never cease to be to the Church a day of consecrated sorrow ; for on the first Good Friday the Son of God died for our sins. Then we gather in spirit at the foot of Calvary and, over a breadth of eighteen centuries, gaze upon the mystery of His Passion. We feel afresh its sad, its tender sentiment ; we long to learn more fully its far-reaching teachings.

Brothers, why should it not be so ever, for sin is met with daily, and its shadows darken human life on every side. As you gather, then, during the solemn Season of Lent, or on the day of our Lord's death, to listen to these addresses, resolve to give effort to the contemplation of the facts of the Passion. Try to forget your Nineteenth Century surroundings, ay ! if possible even the voice that speaks to you. Let us go in spirit to Judæa, and place ourselves in mind and heart near the Cross. Let us listen to those Seven Words, face

each one of them, and think it out as we live in a sustained gaze upon the Crucified. Let us make an effort to interpret them by the help of the Holy Spirit.

And realize your own interest in what was said and done. Then may these quiet times of meditation be fruitful in blessed result. You may have gained at the close a more intense devotion to the Redeemer, which may express itself in worship, or in a consciousness of being drawn nearer to Him—let it not pass into mere sentiment. Oh ! may there be carried away by you some noble inspiration to bear upon the future of life here—something of that abiding motive which was caught by S. Paul from the Vision of the Crucified, and which inspired his after-life of self-sacrificing and noble work—“ He loved me, and gave Himself for me.”

There are various ways in which the Passion of our Lord may be considered. We might consider it historically, and trace its influence on the surrounding world, and through subsequent ages. Very important are its lessons viewed in the light of an historical fact. We might meditate upon it in a

purely devotional aspect, and interpret its teachings with reference to human character and life. Or, again, we might look at it from a doctrinal point of view, and reading it in the light of previous typical illustration, and of subsequent inspired statement, we might see in it a fund of doctrinal truth.

Our object will be to consider it simply as the Revelation of the Atonement. We shall see in it not merely a concentrated expression of the Will and Character of God, but also a fundamental revelation of the return of lost humanity to the Eternal Father.

The Crucifixion has long been as a striking object-lesson before the world—the pale, wounded Form, nailed Hand and Foot to the rough timbers of the Cross—the Sacred Head crowned with thorns—the scoffs of the brutal crowd—the supernatural darkness—we easily recall the scene—the awful tragedy of the Passion !

But what underlies it all ? What motive sustains the sinking Sufferer ? He created the iron which nailed Him there, and one word from Him, and it had crumbled into dust, and He had been

free. Why would He not come down from the Cross? What thoughts give that strength of Will—that strange calmness—that tenderness of love?

We cannot know His secret thoughts, but we do know that thoughts find expression in words. Hence that inner motive—those secret thoughts are in part, at least, revealed by the sayings from the Cross—sayings which were treasured by the witnesses for our sakes.

The Seven Words! There is order in this. Here, as in other places of Scripture, the mystic number seven characterises the revelation so marked out as one of peculiar solemnity.

But further, these seven sayings are divided into two groups of three and four. They represent and interpret the two great Acts, so to speak, in the drama of the Crucifixion.

The mystic number three is the numerical sign of God. In that wounded Form dwelt the fulness of the Godhead. The human Soul of Jesus, which felt the keen anguish of the tortured flesh, and the keener pang of the reproaches which were levelled at Him, was thrilled with infinite love. It was God,

stooping down amid suffering and sorrow, to lift man up from the lowest depths of sin. The first three words from the Crucified are a revelation of the Divine motive from which the work of Redemption sprang. Together they are the expression of the attitude of God towards lost mankind.

The mystic number four is the numerical sign of collective humanity. A significant change marks them off from the previous three. Just before they were spoken, He who knew no sin was made sin for us, and darkness fell around the Cross on which He hung. As the Representative of humanity, He takes the place of fallen man. These four last sayings, then, are the utterance of fallen humanity in contact with the Atonement. They trace the way of salvation along which He bore this humanity into peace with God through the remission of sins. They mark the path by which penitent sinners still return to God, and find in Him forgiveness, and life, and peace.

These considerations, then, lead to the contemplation of the Passion in two consecutive aspects—first as a revelation of God, the Reconciler, yearning

over sinners with the infinite tenderness of His everlasting love, and drawing them to Himself “with cords of a man”—secondly as a revelation of humanity in the Person of the Son of Man coming back to the Eternal Father, and so opening out and tracing the way of salvation for mankind to tread.

Reverently we gaze upon the bleeding Hands and Feet of the Incarnate Crucified, and we recognize how in the silent eloquence of action they proclaim through all time the fact of Redemption. Reverently we listen to the Seven Words from the Cross; is it wrong—is it mere fancy, to attempt to trace through them the mind of the Redeemer? Nay! rather, because Christ suffered, not only willingly, but intelligently, is it not most natural—most reasonable to conclude that the seven sayings reveal something, at least, of the pervading thought, the master motive of the Sacred Life at that most solemn crisis?

But we must bear in mind that the truth of the Atonement is not the whole truth of Christianity. There is the truth of the Incarnation in which the touch, so to speak, of God is laid upon the human race, and the possibilities of Divine power laid open

to mankind. There is the truth of a work of implanted life within the human being, by which this power is exerted in bringing about a personal fitness for Heaven, and there is that other truth which lies behind—a truth too often passed over and forgotten, but to the realization of which all others tend—that Christ is to be “Head over all things to the Church, which is His Body.” But the condition of the accomplishment of the Divine purpose bound up in all these is the remission of sins, for sin is the great separating fact between God and man, and where an intelligent exercise of human will exists, there must be its co-operation with the grace of God in a conscious return and surrender to Him.

With this twofold condition the Atonement deals, for Christ “died for our sins,” and the love of God revealed to the soul—never more powerfully than at the Cross—is the great conquering force by which the human will is subdued into a loyal obedience to the will of God.

First Word.

"FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT
THEY DO."

REMEMBER, the Crucified Redeemer was God and Man. Think of Him as the Incarnate One, the Son of God who had taken humanity into Himself—clasping, as it were, our human nature in His Divine embrace for evermore, and then going to the Cross, bearing our sins in His own body on the "tree," in order to set humanity free from sin. His human nature was yielded to do the will of God, and the strong motive of the love of God was the secret of His patience under human suffering and sorrow. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." Hence the majesty of the Man of Sorrows. He reigns as a King from the Cross, notwithstanding its humiliation and shame. He stoops from His throne to deliver mankind. He has seen

the curse of sin ; He knows the measure of human blindness, unreality, pettiness, cruelty ; and over all is the light of His burning love.

Think of the moment when this love finds expression. The Cross with its living Burden—the Victim of cruel religious prejudice, the Object of mockery to an ignorant crowd—was lifted from the grass and planted in the ground with a rough shock of indescribable agony—“Then said Jesus, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’” This utterance reveals the character of God, the depths of the unchangeable love in the heart of the Eternal towards mankind.

There are men who coldly ask, Is this likely ? Science, they say, reveals a universe of almost numberless worlds, a system so great that this world of ours is but “a small atom in an awful vastness.” Is it likely then that the God of so great a universe should concern Himself with the redemption of so infinitesimal a part ?

True the universe is vast, but it is a connected system ; true, this world is small, but it is a part of this vast organism, and injury done to the smallest

part affects the whole. Enough that sin exists ; its curse extends beyond this world, " the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain." It has lost a certain coherence, a power of fulfilling its design, of perfecting itself in love, because one part is out of order. What then ? The Incarnation reveals the Son of God, the Restorer ; our world the place where the Father's love is in action to seek and to save that which was lost.

How beautifully this is described to us ! A shepherd has a hundred sheep. One has gone astray and is lost. It is only one out of so many ; but the thought of that lonely, erring, suffering one touches the shepherd's heart. He goes out upon the mountains to seek and bring it back. A woman has ten pieces of silver. One is lost. The wealth of the remaining nine does not satisfy ; it must be complete ; and no care is omitted until the missing piece is recovered. Worlds there may be many ; but the one, be it ever so small, which has fallen from its high estate, because it suffers, draws to itself the care of God. Enough that it is the lost. He must go after it. *So* God loved the world.

Brothers, it is so with mankind. The love which in the depths of eternity conceived the thought of our creation, has looked onward through the little childhood of this human life of ours to the true manhood in the great hereafter, with its boundless progress, its magnificent work, its eternal blessedness. Through all the ages God's eternal purpose has been like a golden cord : strong, persistent, as His love. Then what must it be to dare to live in rejection of the claims of God's love upon life here ? What, to ignore the eternal purpose of life, and to use its powers merely for an attempted gratification of the present ? What, deliberately to disappoint His love ? We cannot count the cost of this now ; but surely He knew the meaning of the eternal shipwreck of a human life, who cried in the moment of intensest agony for His murderers, " Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

And further, no one sins alone. No one bears the suffering of sin alone. Each life has its influence upon others. A life lived in sin is an awful fact. God looks down from highest Heaven and sees such a life, a black spot on His fair work, and

throwing its dark shadow over other lives. Is it unlikely that He should seek to remove the blot from the fair picture He surveys?

One jarring note spoils the music of the sweetest harmony. Is it strange to wish, for the sake of that harmony, to put the false note in tune? One sinning world may spoil the universe; one life of sin will spoil a home; one cherished fault will spoil the soul.

Harmony of life must become perfect, in a universe, in a family, in a soul. This is God's will. Hence He comes down to restore a lost world, to bring back a prodigal child, to save a Christian soul from the suffering, the blight of some so-called venial sin.

And there must be harmony between man and God. "Bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth, for I have created them for My glory," is the deep motive which underlies the work of redemption. Sons and daughters—children of the Heavenly Father in the next great Life! Objects of His love for evermore in His Home! Then the child must possess the Father's

nature, or there can be no true sympathy between them. So God's gift is His own eternal life. But the child must reflect the Father's character, or there can be no perfect harmony between them. Hence there must be likeness of thought, that is, heavenly-mindedness, likeness of heart, which is love, and, the result of these, concord of will.

Lack of these is sin. How clear is S. John's definition, "Sin is lawlessness." Yes! but the words mean, "To miss your aim in life is to throw off the rule of the will of God," because that is to become unfit for the life, the home of the heavenly Father.

Brothers, life is fleeting! This Day of Death reminds us that its end will come to each of us. Is life missing its true aim for one here? Then look up to Calvary: Catch the Vision of that wounded Form. Listen how earnestly He pleads, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Is He pleading for thee? What wilt thou say, as thou art face to face with the dying Redeemer?

"O Love, who formedst me to wear
The image of Thy Godhead here.

.

"O Love, who, ere life's earliest dawn,
On me Thy choice has gently laid.

.

O Love, who once in time wast slain,
Pierced through and through with bitter woe ;
O Love, who, wrestling thus didst gain,
That we eternal joy might know ;
O Love, I give myself to Thee—
Thine, ever only 'Thine to be."

Second Word.

"TO-DAY SHALT THOU BE WITH ME IN PARADISE."

Look again, brothers, to Calvary!

Hard is Thy death-bed, O Man of Sorrows ; cruel in their mockery are the shouts that fall upon Thine ear ; yet Thou art calm and patient, led like a lamb to the slaughter !

Who are these at Thy side ? Thy companions in the agony of crucifixion. Do they give Thee the ministry of whispered sympathy under cruel wrong ? Are the three crucified like the three Holy Children of old, who trod together the fiery furnace and felt no hurt ?

Ah ! No ! These are robbers, outcasts of society, receiving the reward of their deeds of violence and blood. Truly Thou art numbered with the transgressors, on either side one, and Thou, O Redeemer, in the midst.

In them is no sympathy. They are sinking into eternity, so near the Judgment, these men of blood, yet they join their insults with those of the crowd. "They know not what they do;" and for them also Jesus has prayed.

Then one grew serious as he felt himself face to face with death. Henceforth he hung in silent agony. For him life had been a deepening curse. And was this all?

The past rose before him—boyhood, youth, manhood, with the half-forgotten sins. Conscience was awakened. Then came back words of that strange Fellow-Sufferer heard in days gone by. And then the thought of His more than human patience—His sad words of prophetic warning—His touching prayer of love. All rose together before his mind. He was startled—awe-stricken! He turned to his comrade: "Hast thou no fear of God? It is no time to mock, when death is so near. Besides, we are reaping the reward of our sins: He is a Sinless Sufferer." The truth flashed across his soul, for an unseen Power was touching him.

Is this, indeed, the Redeemer—the Messiah of

Israel? The world has given Him only a Cross : His Kingdom, His Glory are beyond. And turning his head towards Jesus, he prayed, " Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom." His thoughts might be vague, but the penitent heart, the earnest faith, which uttered them, touched the heart of the Saviour. Hitherto He had heard nothing but the blasphemy of the mob. Now came this humble prayer, like balm upon His wounded Spirit. Calmly, and with the dignity of a King, Divine love finds expression in the pardon of sin and the gift of blessed life in Paradise !

"To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

In this assurance he rests for the little that remains of life's journey here. The brain may whirl ; the tortured limbs may throb with agony ; the sight may fail in gathering darkness. It is enough, the word is spoken, and there is light within at eventide. He had come weary and heavy laden. Oh ! how weary with the unrest of that life of sin ! Oh ! how heavy-laden with that Cross, but he had found rest to his soul ! As he waited to depart, hardness was gone, love was there, and,

shall we not say, the tears that dropped down those pale features, which no hand might dry, were blended with the sigh of regret, "Oh! that I had found Him sooner."

Paradise! Where is it? What is it?

Its locality we cannot tell, nor need we speculate. Home does not depend upon its being a mansion, or a cottage, on a hill, or in a valley. Home is the dwelling-place where purity and love and peace are. So the blessedness of Paradise is not a question of where it is, but of what it is.

The word "Paradise" means an enclosed and beautiful spot—a park-like place, shut in from the open forest. It is, therefore, some spot in God's creation where the souls of the departed are in His safe keeping. Oh! think not of it as a prison-house, but as a safe and happy home. Here life is a journey through a wilderness, and the Evil One prowls round and dogs our steps. There no foe can approach to frighten or to do us harm.

It is a life "with Christ." Under the transfiguring vision of Jesus, souls spring, like flowers in the clear sunlight, into the beauty, the fragrance,

the full growth of heavenliness, for "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

Oh! brothers, have you ever taken your New Testament and pondered over some saying of Jesus, some principle of life He lays down, and tried to measure its meaning? Have you thought of some earnest Christian life as you have known it to be day by day? Have you asked your own heart? Have you thought of the distractions, the conflict, the weariness with which life is conditioned here? Then you have felt this little life of threescore years and ten to be all too short to work the principle out. Where shall it be done if not in that blessed resting-place?

Have you seen in the early summer how the energy of vegetable life is put forth, and the year's growth is done? Then follow the calm August days, and the corn-fields ripen, under the golden sunlight, for the reaper's toil. So is it with us. The energies of the soul are taxed, for progress is with prayer and watchfulness and conflict, as we fight the good fight of faith; there the tired soul may rest at the side of the Lord—aye! and ripen in saintliness

as it basks in the sunshine of the life and love of the Redeemer.

“ O happy land of Paradise !
Sweet home of rest above,
Where faithful souls are satisfied
In God's eternal love.
For Jesus' sake they laboured on,
And in their toil were blest,
And now they reap a rich reward
For at His side they rest.

O happy land of Paradise !
Sweet meeting-place beyond,
Where hearts are joined in perfect love,
And nothing mars the bond.
No faults disturb, no failings grieve,
No selfishness is there ;
But God's own purity pervades
The happy life they share.

O happy land of Paradise !
Sweet life of blessed Peace,
Where Satan cannot lead astray,
And doubt and error cease.
Temptation is for ever past,
The work of trial done ;
The battle of the Cross is o'er,
The Crown of Victory won.

“O happy land of Paradise !
Sweet border-land of Heaven,
Where first the sight of that great life
To longing souls is given.
Its golden morning brightens on,
From sunrise until noon ;
Glad promise that its perfect bliss
Will come in fulness soon.”

But this present life leads into the future. Between this life and that, the change we call death is a change of our circumstances, not of ourselves. It is, as it were, turning a corner in the way of life, and going on still. The old surroundings are left out of sight, and new associations are revealed ; but we begin the next as we leave the present life.

But is there no change in ourselves? Life is human here ; but, hereafter, the Children of God must be partakers of the Divine nature. And the distinction, between what is human and what is Divine, is one not of degree but of kind. There is a change ; but it comes not in the moment of departure from this world to the next, but in the gift of “Eternal Life” to us here.

Eternal Life is not a mere extension of time ; it

is rather a timeless state. Time is one thing ; eternity is another thing. Hence S. Paul's definition. "The things which are seen are temporal ; the things which are unseen are eternal." What the eye looks upon—the solid hills, the lights on sky and sea, the changing leaf—these belong to time ; but round us here, touching us with its mysterious influence, invisible, but so real, is the eternal.

Eternal Life is God's Life, because He is eternal. It is everlasting because it is Divine, and so outside the reach of death. Listen to S. John. "God hath given to us Eternal Life, and this Life is in His Son ; he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life." It is not linked with days and years, nor is it spoken of as a future state, but as something that is with the Father, and in the Son. It is not a quantity, but a kind of life that is pointed to. It is not a mere endlessness of improved existence, a mere everlasting happiness ; but it is a spiritual condition into which we enter when we receive Christ as the Gift of God. We pass from death to life. It is life into which we pass, because it is participation in what

God is, who is Light, who is Love, who is Righteousness. The Eternal Life in a man is the possession of a man by the light, the love, the righteousness, whose source and infinite fulness is God. *

Eternal Life is God's gift to man here. Born again from above, and consciously realizing his gift, life here is thenceforward an eternal childhood, a time of growth and of education for the great mature life beyond. Progress may be slow here, for there is much that opposes: it may be rapid there, where all conditions are favourable: but we cannot speak with absolute certainty. The present—the living present—life, precious with opportunities, is ours; let us use it well day by day, remembering that what a man sows, that he shall reap!

Eternal Life is God's gift to man here: Paradise is its Crown. The robber received life here. True, it was in the closing eventide of this world's working day. Its opportunities were lost: maybe their possible result lost too. But who shall measure the amount of his advantages, or judge of the pre-

* "Life, is it worth Living?" p. 159.

paration of soul, that led up to his owning the Prince of Life in that rejected Man of Sorrows ; who can assert that he had sinned against light, or had wilfully trifled with the Saviour? Jesus spoke to him in love, and the current of his life was turned Godward. A few hours passed by, and he departed to be with Christ.

“In Paradise—to-day.” Life in Paradise, is first life here. To have the peace of sin forgiven, to know the rest of surrender to the Will of God, to enjoy the refreshment of Sacramental Grace, to taste the sweetness of being alone with God, to touch the mystery of the Communion of Saints—these are joys of Paradise here.

“In Paradise—to-day.” Life in Paradise is the future of life here. From the first tender streak of dawn to the full glory of a cloudless summer day, it is the same light that brightens on from first to last. So with the Christian soul, “the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more to the perfect day.”

The Alpine mountaineer descends in the last hour of night to the valley of the torrent, that

rushes at the mountain's base—and begins to ascend. As he passes through the forest, he looks out upon the first pink flush of dawn, which touches some distant peak, while yet the dark shades of night lie among the pines. As he mounts higher, he meets the growing light of morning, and the shadows gradually fall back into the valleys. At length he turns the corner of a rock, and is face to face with the sun—henceforth his path has passed out from the tender half-light of the forest into the sweet sunshine that plays upon the mountain side.

So it is with us ; spiritual life has its tender, its sweet experiences here—we walk with Jesus on earth, but we walk by faith, and not by sight. But the moment draws nearer every step, when we turn the corner, and entering the happy land of Paradise, stand in the clear sunlight, and gaze upon the Sun of Righteousness face to face. But, both here and there, there is the same light right through, because the same life of the soul.

When shall it be received ? This world is an uncertain possession. It has its precious opportuni-

ties of preparation. The future to which it leads is great and everlasting. Never too early in this world's journey to enter into the realization of eternal life. The Redeemer says, "To-day."

Oh, brothers, when the sum of this life's toil is taken, as the shadows begin to fall, and the night comes when no man can work, what will remain? What will stand by us when we are called to go forth from houses and lands, from position and fame, from friends, and all their kindly estimate of us—to go forth alone—in solemn silence into the unseen—what will stand by us then? Only those possessions—those treasures of righteousness, of truth, of humility, of love, which have been gained and stereotyped upon the character, by the power of the Grace of God. These will be—and these alone—the accumulated capital with which we may start in life in the other world.

Be the attainment of these the supreme object of life's effort: and to this be every other aim subordinate, as we measure the significance of the present by the standard of eternal interest! And Thou, O Redeemer, wilt help us from Thy Throne by the

gift of that Eternal Life,—Thine own Life, Thine own Power, working in us, and enabling us to work out our own salvation, and by Thine Intercession, as we press towards the breaking of Eternal Day.

Third Word.

"BEHOLD THY SON . . . BEHOLD THY MOTHER."

THE utterances of our Redeemer during the agony of the Crucifixion are taken to be a revelation of His inner life at the time. It is natural that it should be so. His heart throbs with the deep emotion of an inimitable purpose of love which fills His Soul, and this intense feeling finds expression in words.

One thing we learn from this revelation is, that during the first hours upon the Cross there is a complete forgetfulness of self. Physical agony seems to be ignored. The idea of the accomplishment of the Redemption of the world rises superior to everything else, and the eternal purpose of Divine Love for sinners absorbs every other thought.

O Love of God, everlasting and unchangeable !

What stronger proof of its depth and reality could have been given than the Passion of Jesus? He loves to the death.

There are spiritual lives which begin, like the bright sunrise of a summer morning, in joy and gladness, and then, as the hours flow on, they become overcast. No fault, no sin has done it, but a veil of cloud has seemed to be drawn by an unseen hand across the clear sky, and the light of the Father's countenance is eclipsed. And then immediately the soul is startled and afraid. "Is God angry?" it asks. "Is the Love in which I rested no longer a fact?"

So easily is the revelation of Calvary forgotten; so soon the soul, that has vowed an eternal trust in the Son of God, may be found to falter before the first lessons to walk by faith, and not by sight. Beyond the passing cloud, above the mist and shadow—yea! behind the blackness of storm and tempest, as we see it at the Cross, the Sun is shining still in the calmness of eternal strength. Then "why art thou so cast down, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me? Put thy trust in

God, and thou shalt yet give Him thanks for the help of His countenance.”

We learn further, from the revelation of these three first words, that redemption from sin is ever bound up with the gift of eternal life. As the Divine character of the Redeemer is foremost in the earlier stages of the Passion, so the first three utterances reveal His recognition of the needs of the human soul with regard to eternal life. They are revelations of the love of God, only in different ways. The first declares His yearning to restore the lost ; the second, His readiness to receive back a penitent sinner, and to give him the eternal life ; the third manifests His tender consideration of that which is the germ of one great part of the blessedness of that future existence—the holy bonds of human love.

The disciples of Jesus had fled, and He had gone forth “to tread the wine-press alone.” The agony of Crucifixion is becoming each moment more intense. The mob, growing weary with the shout of their revilings, is falling back ; but round Him are gathering and drawing nearer the unseen Powers

of Darkness. Notwithstanding the bitter travail of His Soul, He notices at a little distance by the road-side the disciple whom He held especially dear. Love had triumphed over fear, and he had braved the crowd. And at his side is the shrinking, half-fainting figure of a woman. It is His Mother. In the earliest helpless days of human infancy He had been content to nestle to her breast ; and now, as He lies in dying agony bound to the Cross, she has come to stand by that strange death-bed. His Mother ! He turns to her His eyes, scorched with fevered pain, yet lighting up with unspeakable tenderness. She looks up and gazes on the bleeding Form of her Son. In that glance a sword pierces her soul : she feels the wounds in a mother's love. He remembers those quiet days of the home-life at Nazareth, and the holy bonds of human love which for thirty years had bound them heart to heart—Mother and Son ! Fresh were the memories of that sweet childhood, when it was His joy to recognize His Mother's gentle rule—of that strong, pure, early manhood, when, at eventide, and the toil of the workshop done, He would sit by her side, and, as

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they looked out at the fading light upon the hills, He would teach her deep lessons of heavenly truth.

And she remembers them too—these memories that seemed but of yesterday. She was a widow, and He her only Son! And now, was all over? Were they to be no more than a dream of the past, leaving nothing behind but a deep abiding sorrow? Was that pure Love also to be murdered upon the Cross, and die? Was her life henceforth to be hopeless and desolate?

Not so! The care of that Mother's love has its place amid the cares of winning a world's salvation. It is worth the effort it costs to turn aside on the battle-field of the Cross to shelter the tender plant of a pure human affection. "Woman, behold thy son; he will take care of thee for My sake. O My disciple, behold thy Mother."

The words fell upon the ear of the disciple like the last whisper from beloved lips upon a death-bed; they bound his heart with the force of a dying wish. Immediately he led her away to his own home.

Was the motive of that command of love merely

a thought of pity that would try to soothe a bereaved mother's grief, by providing her with a home for the few short years that remained of life? Was it only a kindness that would help time to heal the wound of that tragic parting, by helping her to forget? Was it, in fact, a suppression, as gently as love could make it, of the charm of a noble influence upon her life, because the fact from which it sprang was shattered and gone, and could be no more; or was it the intention to shelter through a night of sorrow what had been yesterday a beautiful opening bud of holy human affection, and what on the great to-morrow was to blossom out in the grandeur of perfected tenderness and self-sacrifice?

As S. Mary and S. John gazed afterward upon the glorified Person of her Son and Lord; as they pondered over His words, "I ascend to My Father and to your Father, to My God, and to your God;" as they watched Him rise from Olivet, and listened to the Angel's words, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven." Tell me, was there no hope of meeting again

beyond the boundary of this life? Was that pure human affection to be cared for and sheltered for nothing? Rather was it not to be transfigured with a heavenly character and beauty, and so continue there—to lose whatever belongs merely to the conditions of earth—to gain what comes from the transcendent glory of Heaven, and yet itself to remain permanent in its own intrinsic worth.

Yet there are those who tell us, "There is a life beyond; but there the mother will not know her child, nor the brother the sister, nor the husband the wife. There are no recognitions beyond the grave."

Then why is the love that binds human hearts together bestowed upon us here at all? Or why does it not leave us when we become Christian? Why is it the secret of the development in us of what is morally beautiful and strong and good during our short life of education here, if it is only to stop when we pass within the veil to be in the next life what we have become here?

Love is the great power that moves and shapes human life.

There is the influence of friendships.

Not only does the loveableness of one we know call out our love in return, but the very affection kindled within us has a reflective force upon ourselves. We are especially receptive of impressions from those whom we love, and by them, unconsciously, perhaps, the character is influenced. It is assimilated to the likeness of the one, who holds our hearts as with a charm by holding its love. The truth of this law has passed into a proverb. "Tell me what a man's friends are, and I will tell you what he is."

Not the men we meet in business, or come in contact with in the external relationships of life, have this effect upon us. We touch them as they pass us on the highway of the world, and they are gone ; but those we come to love, who by means of that love enter beneath the surface of our lives and touch the heart with all its tender sensibilities—these are they who help to form the character and prepare the final result of life.

There is also love as the motive of human life.

What the heart longs for, the will is set to gain, and with this purpose the life regulated. This

motive of love, shewn in the aim of life, gives the tone to the friendships that are formed.

You have seen how the sea takes its colour from the sky. One day, an expanse of deep blue above, across which drift light forms of fleeting cloud, and the sea seems to flash back smiles of azure light, or to gleam in varying tints of violet and emerald; another day all is changed, and it appears to lie in dull, uninteresting monotony, under the frown of a cold, grey canopy of mist. How different it is!

So over all the strong, the secret influences which bear upon us from the loves of friendship, is the motive of love which is the guiding principle of life.

Practically, it takes one of two directions. It is either fixed on God, or centred upon self. In the one case, its inner spirit is a recognition of service due to God, and it reaches into the unseen, the sphere of the Eternal. In the other, it is limited to the region of the seen, the strictly temporal, because its aim is no higher than self-gratification.

Where the master principle of life is the love of God, carrying with it devotion to what is perfectly

pure, and true, and good, there is the guiding principle in the selection of friends, and by which the kind of influence they will have is determined. Like attracts like. The soul in which the love of God has created a pure, a lofty, ideal of life, feels no attraction in a character which is mean or low, because it finds there nothing in common. It is arrested by the touch of sympathy, and the basis of fellowship is found in that love, which is mutually the motive of life. Such friends help each other.

It is a God-given law of human nature that friendships are formed. Happy when it is under the controlling principle of love for God, for in that love they are consecrated to a noble and a heavenly purpose. The commandment, "Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart," does not make us inhuman by excluding and destroying the affections of earth; it means that they are to be included in the love of God, and so transfigured and sanctified.

How real is the refining influence of such a friendship upon each of the lives it binds together! How firm its moorings when the tide of fashion flows towards what is wrong! And who can

measure the power of one strong life exerted through a holy friendship upon another, that is struggling amid the fevered fires of temptation for the principle of a lofty ideal, newly formed within by the love of God ?

On the other hand, if the governing motive of life is self-gratification, and friendships are formed through the attractiveness of mere clever wit, or physical grace, or the acquisition of wealth or position, because these minister to the gratification of self ; then the standard of the influence of these friendships is also fixed. They are limited to the present, to the sphere of the seen—the temporal. They are no help heavenwards. Missing their true purpose, they may sink lower still, even to the level of mere animal appetite ; and then, losing the light which comes from eternal life, perish in the gloom of dissatisfaction and despair.

Oh ! brothers ! Guide, control the formation of friendships with the high principle of love for God — the Holy One — the Truth — the Perfect Goodness ; and then keep them pure.

Remember, it is a God-given law of life ; keep it

in harmony with the purpose with which human life itself was given.

Remember, marriage—bear with me if I speak of it—is not a mere merging of separate material interests into one—not only the outcome of a oneness of heart ; it is also a unison of soul with soul in an eternal friendship by the Holy Ghost—interests, heart, soul—as if God has stamped upon this sacred relationship the mark of His own Trinity of Being !

Remember, “in the Lord” is the highest meeting-place of human affections between parents and children, brothers and sisters ; it is where they are consecrated to their high and eternal purpose.

Then, when this life is over, and the next world’s eternal day has broken, these loves may live on for ever, but under altered conditions. There no evil suggestions can have place, no mixed motives hold, nothing to vex or mar the purity, the simplicity, the unselfishness of love.

There no father will go early to his toil, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness, for his children’s sake—no mother’s thoughts required for

the daily care of the management of home. There is "neither marrying nor giving in marriage," but all will be "as the angels which are in Heaven." Angels! Messengers and ministers of God! To be like them in that perfected human life, what is it but perfectly to understand the wisdom of the Eternal, to be thrilled by the power of His Everlasting Love; and in the rapture of perfect sympathy, to have the dignity, the blessedness, of helping to carry out the purposes of His Love in the universe?

This is the great vocation towards which all else must tend: for which many a life is kept free from earthly cares, and given leisure to prepare—in which, too, those may yet have lives splendid with active service, who here can only serve God as they "lie still and wait."

Love is eternal. Did ever a human heart, in the sweet springtime of a true friendship, fix a limit to its existence? Did ever a mother, gazing on the fair face of her little child, deliberately bargain with her own heart, "I will love my child for so long, and no longer—for so many weeks or months, and then my love shall stop?" Never.

Love is meant to be eternal. Death will not kill it ; nor will it be buried in the grave. It may be cut down above the surface, like the flowers by the first frosts of winter, but only to spring up and bloom afresh in the coming summer-time.

Oh ! it is because love is eternal, that it is so sacred a thing, and has so firm a hold upon the heart. You may enter upon it lightly—frivolously—and then make shipwreck of it, and it will perish, but it is with pain—with sorrow, under which the heart may break—just because it is not meant to die, but to be eternal.

Three summers ago, I passed one evening along a country lane, and came upon a churchyard. Attracted by the quietness of the spot, I crossed the stile, and entered the sacred enclosure. On the other side, I saw the figure of a woman in black, bending over a little grave, on which the grass was not yet green. She was arranging flowers upon the soil. The glory of the setting sun bathed the old church tower in golden light,—the leaves of the beeches over her danced merrily in the summer breeze—the evensong of the birds came sweetly

from the meadows—it was sad to think of death at such a time. Yet so it was! She raised herself from her task, and I went and stood by her side—“Yours has been a work of love, I have no doubt?” “Ah! yes! under those flowers sleeps my darling child—yet, not so, the face I loved to kiss is there, but she is with Jesus above.”

So does the thought of some dear one waiting in the Paradise of God, nerve us to be true, and to fight to the end the good fight of faith: so are souls drawn heavenward by the force of a pure, God-given human affection—as with cords which come from out eternity.

“Hark! my soul, the sound of voices
Chanting on a distant shore!
There they stand in sweetest sunlight,
All resplendent evermore.

Hark! it is the voice of loved ones,
Calling from a better home,
Tender child and praying mother—
Still we hear them bid us come.

There by burning love transfigured,
There in dazzling purity!
Hosts adore the great Eternal,
Bowing down unceasingly,

“ There the Lamb, the Word Incarnate.
Reigns in realms of beauteous light,
There with hosts of sinless angels,
Stand the sin-cleansed robed in white.

Oh ! the beauty ! oh ! the greatness
Of that life so full and free !
Where the Spirit's love and sweetness
Circles round them like a sea.

Come then, brothers, through life's shadows,
Let us seek that blessed home :
Ever praying, bravely striving,
Till we join them at the Throne.

On Thy grace, O Christ, relying,
We will meet—Ah ! meet once more—
When the day shall break all glorious,
On that sweet eternal shore.”

De Profundis.

Introductory to the last Four Words from the Cross.

**“Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body
hast Thou prepared Me.”—HEB. x. 5.**

A CHANGE passes over the tragedy of the Crucifixion.

“WHEN THE SIXTH HOUR WAS COME THERE WAS DARKNESS OVER ALL THE LAND UNTIL THE NINTH HOUR.”

“There was darkness.” It deepened round the Cross. The pale bruised Form of the Man of Sorrows grew indistinct and was lost to sight, shrouded in impenetrable gloom. They were not the shadows of night which were falling, for it was the “sixth hour”—the bright noonday of the East—and yet, O Redeemer, Thou didst feel it. There was night there. It was not the coincidence of an eclipse of the sun, for this was the time of the full moon of the Passover; and yet there was an awful eclipse, which was the underlying secret of it all.

It was as if some sorrowing angel's hands, unseen, had drawn in pity and shame the curtains of the sky around the death-chamber of the Redeemer. And in the stillness, like the stillness of midnight, they were keeping watch at the side of the dying Son of God.

Such a thought is tender sentiment ; is it more ? We dare not believe it, for " He trod the winepress alone."

There was silence about the Cross. The Mother of Jesus had been led away. The crowd had broken up. There was no shout, no mockery, no sound. A few awe-stricken watchers, with the Centurion, kept their ground in the gathering gloom ; and " there was silence deep as death, and that the boldest held his breath for a time."

It fell upon Jerusalem. As noonday approached men were at their work. In the city was the hum and sound of life. There was stir and movement in the streets. The Priests were going up to the Temple Courts, and there was preparation for the usual sacrifice.

And over all these came the hush and the fear of a

strange darkness. Silence was in the home. Movement was stopped. Men had gathered in little groups in the streets, and stood still. It spread from Calvary, and settled down like a dark pall over the Holy City and over all the land.

Its shadows darkened the home of Bethany and the slopes of Olivet. They sank upon the blue waters of the sea of Galilee, and upon fair scenes of His teachings by its shores. They were noticed by many a one who had been blessed by His deeds of power.

How far the darkness extended we know not. There are traditions which mention its reaching other countries.

You have gazed upon the strange stone which stands reared on the Thames Embankment, so lonely-looking amid its nineteenth century surroundings, and wearing still the mystery of other ages—the obelisk of Heliopolis. Have you remembered that over that very stone, the darkness of Calvary, this shadow of the Cross, is reported to have fallen? The ancient astronomer, Dionysius, is said to have exclaimed, when he saw the gathering

shadows, "Either the gods are suffering, or the mechanism of the world is breaking up."

What was the cause of this mysterious darkness? The fact of it we know. Whence did it come?

Was it nature in sympathy with nature's God? Was the physical gloom which overspread the sky a kind of reflection of the spiritual darkness which fell upon the soul of the Redeemer, as the sight of deep sorrow will call forth the shadow of sadness upon the face of a friend? He, who was crucified, was at the source of Creation, for by the Word, "all things were made," and over all at the last the glorified Incarnate Word will be enthroned as King. Can we trace and define the limits of sympathy at the time when He was rescuing one dark spot in the fair universe from the mysterious consequences of human sin?

And yet such shadow of sympathetic sorrow on the face of nature seems only a tender poetical sentiment.

Over the battle-field, red with the cruel marks of human strife and death, strewn with ghastly forms,

the spoil of many a home, the moon throws her pure light calmly down.

News will spread. A few days—hours perhaps—and many a heart will be wrung with the first pang of an abiding sorrow, and into many a home will come the shadow of a desolating loss, and yet the sun will rise and smile upon it all; the brightness of the flowers, the song of the birds, the freshness of the breeze will be unchanged. Who has not felt sometimes the strange contrast “between the smile of the sun and the agony of that which the sun smiles upon?”

Yet, after all, the Passion was unique as a mystery of suffering. We cannot measure the possibilities of what took place during those three hours of silence. Powers of an unseen world may have gathered in dire reality round the Cross—Powers of the Air—Powers of Darkness! We know, in fact, but little of the extent and the character of the forces of evil.

Two facts we know. The Soul of the Redeemer passed into an awful loneliness. It is revealed by the long silence, broken at last by the exceeding bitter cry. And we know that the heavens were

shrouded at mid-day with a strange darkness. It was more than a singular coincidence, it was supernatural. It was (oh! shall we not venture to say it?) the power of a spiritual force making itself felt upon the laws of nature—a spiritual fact expressing itself in the language of physical phenomena.

A few months before, on the slopes of Hermon, when the world was asleep, and the mountain wrapped in the silence of night, Jesus was kneeling in prayer. It was the mysterious hour of consecration of His human nature—a nature like ours, now in its prime, and thrilled with the human delight of living—to the Will of God at the approach of the Passion. Prayer is the soul in converse with God. And as He continued praying, His soul was uplifted as by an unseen Power above all earthly sorrows. “Drawn forth by the nearness of His Heavenly Father, the Divinity within shone through the veiling flesh, till His raiment kindled to the dazzling brightness of light, or of the glittering snow on the peaks above Him, and His face glowed with a sunlike majesty.”

What was that light which shone forth across the

dewy grass from the kneeling figure of the Son of Man? It was the eternal life reinforced from Heaven through prayer, and thrilling His human nature,—it was this life issuing in an outward and visible manifestation. It was the spiritual life in Him which is the spiritual light of men, expressed in a physical form. It was seen by the three disciples, who were chosen to be witnesses of the transfiguration, and was recorded for our sakes in after ages. It was to them, and through them to us, a demonstration of the reality of that eternal life which was with the Father and is in the Son, and flows from and through Him to the human members of His Body—the Church of Christ. “This is the record,” writes S. John in after years, “that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” And again, that wonderful parenthesis of recollection of the night of the transfiguration—“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father).”

He goes forth from the transfiguration as the Lamb of God appointed to die. He encounters each shock in the gathering battle of the Passion in solemn thoughtfulness indeed, but in the power of a mysterious strength. The sunlight of the life of the Eternal streamed into His soul unhindered as yet by any cloud or obstacle of sin.

The life-sap, as it were, flowed from the Root into the Vine unchecked by any intervening barrier. The terrible conflict of Gethsemane, the shameful mockery of the trial—the dread agony of the Crucifixion, were all met with the sustained calmness of a conscious communion with the Heavenly Father. Though His Crown be of thorns, and a cross His Throne, yet He reigns as a King during the first hours on Calvary : we recognize the royal lineage of Heaven, breaking forth from beneath the disguise of humiliation and suffering, in the Crucified Redeemer.

Then comes a change. Shadows fall on the Sacred Features, and gather into blackness round the Cross. Where is He ? No sight, no sound ; all is lost in awful darkness, and three long hours

have nearly passed away. Then one bitter melancholy cry is heard through the gloom, "My God, My God, Why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Oh! if it be not incongruous to gaze and think, when we ought rather to bow down the head and worship, what is the revelation of the darkness, the silence, the cry? What does it all mean?

"The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

In one Divine Eternal glance, that knows no boundary of past or future, He surveys the ages of the human race from first to last: He takes in the history of each human life from the cradle to the grave: He measures from the first motive to its consummated guilt, the character and extent of every sin—one upward look of love—"Father, the hour is come, and the Power of Darkness—give Me the guilt of mankind—Thou lovest them with Everlasting Love—and with Thy Love, I love them too." He enters the gloom. He who knew no sin is "made sin for us," and He hangs in awful loneliness. No light, no consciousness of the Heavenly Father's Presence comes to Him now:

round Him are gathered the Powers of Darkness.

O brothers, do you see the meaning? Sin is the separating cause between God and man. That darkness of soul which oppressed the Redeemer, was a consequence of sin laid upon Him. He "tasted" the "outer darkness," which is spiritual death. The sunlight of eternal life was cut off in awful eclipse.

And the spiritual fact was supernaturally manifested in the deep gloom which spread from the Cross over all the land. It was seen by witnesses: and recorded by them with circumstantial minuteness. Like the transfiguration, it teaches a truth. It was the supernatural demonstration in physical phenomena of this spiritual law. The consequence of sin is separation from the life and light of communion with God—The wages of sin is death.

No human life is an exception to this law.

In a previous address, I have spoken of the historical continuity of life. We approach the boundary of this world. The final moment comes, and we pass into the unseen—one scene, intensely interesting to us now as we journey on, closes

behind us, and is gone ; another scene opens out before us in infinite extent. We call it the next life. What will it be? Can we answer this question? Broadly we can ; for there is continuity through the crisis. The righteous are righteous still : the unrighteous are unrighteous still. Eternal life is to be lived here, and "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." The blessed experiences of the soul's life here lead on into the more blessed life "with Christ" in the Paradise of God, and afterwards in the glories of Heaven. Eternal death may go on here—I mean, that condition of soul in which it is cut off by unrepented sin from the Eternal Life and Light of God. Such a life "walks in darkness"—and the shadows deepen, until, in a moment, it has entered the unseen, and gone to "its own place"—the "outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth." What then? God knows.

Waste not the passing present, so full of opportunity, in mere speculations about possibilities beyond, which may never be. What right have we—what reason have we to venture to conclude what God

ought to do, unless we are certain that we know all the facts of the case? The present is ours ; life is passing, and death draws nearer—how near it is we cannot tell.

“ Oh ! shall I pass away alone
Into Eternity !
O God, what voice will meet me there ?
What hand be laid on me ?
If I have lived a wasted life,
Or missed its purpose high,
Or been unreal in my faith,
How can I—dare I—die ?
And must I stand before the Throne,
And judgment then begin
On all the wicked deeds of life,
And every secret sin.”

It has been told us that one who had been a leader in the gay world of frivolity and fashion, drew near at last to the border line of the unseen : as she lay dying, she said, “ O my God, it is over ! I have come to the end of it—the end—the end ! To have only one life—and to have done with it—and to lie here ! To have lived, and loved, and triumphed, and to know that it is all over ! One

may defy everything else, but not this!" Such words—so inexpressibly sad—were her last. In a moment the features were fixed, her eyes gazed on with a lifeless, stony stare—she was gone!

Would you say such a life was a failure? More, it ended in disaster! The aim of life was missed, and the consequences reached beyond the present world.

Brothers, turn once more to the Cross of Jesus, and read with me the revelation of the darkness.

We have seen that the cause of it was that God "laid upon Him the iniquity of us all." It was *our* sin under which the soul of the Sinless One lay in loneliness and night. "He bore them in His own Body on the tree," that He might make known to us the way of salvation by the remission of sins.

Life is a history. Day by day each page is written with thoughts and words and deeds, and we pass on. Renewed effort after righteousness there may be from time to time; but, oh! the history of the past! we cannot undo its wrong, nor take away the guilt, because past days never come to us again. We turn to the Crucified. O Man of Sorrows, yet full

of human sympathy! O Son of God, filled with Infinite Love! we gaze upon Thy Passion—we recognise the meaning of the bleeding Wounds—we need Thy Forgiveness—the Cleansing of Thy Precious Blood.

Yes! sin is a fact of life as it is. Who has thought at all, and not been startled by the distance between what is felt of possible goodness and what is actually achieved? And sin must be forgiven here. We must come to the Cross for the Absolution of the Crucified, and then live in the touch, the power of the Precious Blood, until life itself is freed from the limitations, the imperfections, the failings of its present conditions, by entering another world.

“ Hold Thou Thy Cross before my closing eyes,
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies,
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee ;
In life—in death—O Lord, abide with me.”

Fourth Word.

"MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?"

DURING the first hours upon the Cross, the Incarnate reigns as a King in the majesty of love and sorrow. He speaks with calm dignity in the exercise of His Priestly Office as He pleads for sinners ; as He absolves the penitent robber ; as he soothes a follower's grief, and orders a disciple's service.

"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." The sacred humanity was absolutely controlled by the power of His Divinity, and every thought and desire was in perfect sympathy with the great motive of Divine Love which thrilled His Being.

Then there was a change. He who knew no sin was made sin for us. On that sinless humanity came the horror of the contact and the weight of the curse of human sin. And then follows the operation of a spiritual law : sin separates from God ;

and He enters into that region of "outer darkness" of soul, which is death ; the reality of which is shewn by the supernatural manifestation of the impenetrable gloom which settled down about the Cross.

Listen to the cry which comes out of the darkness—"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

That was the voice of the Incarnate Son of God.

Could the Everlasting Son be separated from the Everlasting Father? Could that distinctly personal union between God and Man, which was effected in the Incarnation, be dissolved? No! This could not be.

Remember this cry came from the Incarnate,—God made Man. His soul experienced separation from the conscious Presence of God. It had lost the consciousness of the protective Love, and the providential Care, of the Eternal Father. He hung in awful loneliness—in "outer darkness." He, whose nature was most sensitive, because perfectly pure, whose Heart, because filled with perfect Love, most yearned for sympathy and companionship—He felt "forsaken."

To say that He was absolutely separated from God is not true, for He was the Eternal Son, "Very God of Very God." To say that there was no separation is equally untrue: His cry of dereliction proclaims the fact of conscious loss of God.

It is so with many of us in life's journey.

There are souls to whom His Incarnation has been extended—they have been baptised into Christ and made members of His Body, and so children of God, yet have no inward realization of sonship. No joy of Divine acceptance gladdens them. They have lost communion with the Eternal, and their hearts throb not with His Love. Sacrament, and prayer, and worship, are cold, objective forms, and spiritual insensibility is creeping over them. They have already begun "to walk in darkness and in the valley of the shadow of death." A shallow religious phraseology speaks of them as not being children of God at all, and speaks untruly—His children they are, for they have been engrafted into the Incarnate. He is the Vine, and they the Branches, but they have been ceasing to abide in Him, and the power of His life has been failing to reach the soul.

Sin, like an unholy cloud, has come into the being, and the holy grace which flows from Him has become paralyzed. The sunshine of spiritual light is clouded over and hidden in darkness. They have lost the sweet beatitude of life—"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Yet all the time of sinful carelessness and neglect, the tender solicitude of the Heavenly Father's love follows each of them in the thought of sorrow. "This my son is dead—is lost." Everlasting love cannot fail and give them up, and say, "They have made their choice, let them go, they will not be missed in a universe which teems with life." Rather, it speaks in words like these, "Bring My sons from far . . . I have created them for My glory."

Brothers, the worst aspect of sin is that it is the rebellion of a son—the disappointment of a Father by the Child of His Love !

Again, although the sense of being forsaken lay like a cold dead weight upon the heart of the Redeemer, belief in God remained. Somewhere beyond the clouds and thick darkness which had closed upon Him, the light of the Eternal Father's

Presence was shining still. Somewhere the Everlasting Love was mighty in operation—somewhere—but the soul of Jesus was lost to it all ; and life, in the terrible loneliness—in the utter darkness—in the horror of contact with sin, was intolerable.

O friends, the most awful condition of a sinful life is when there is no consciousness of sin.

The sense of sin is negative ; it is the conscious absence of that purity of life, which is spiritual health ; of that peace of soul, which is inward harmony of the being ; of that transparency of spirit which is the light—altogether, the conscious separation from One who comprehends all this,—from God.

But to have wandered away so far as to forget, and the thought of God with which we are born to be all but gone ; to have violated the conscience until it has become insensible and dead ; to have strangled the aspirations of the soul when they have pleaded for a higher and nobler life ; to have closed every avenue of the Spirit leading up to God ; and then in the self-chosen darkness to look round and be foolhardy enough to say “There is no God.”

This—this is a condition of soul well-nigh desperate ! Then faith in the eternal goes out of life, and present realization marks the value of every offered good. Men look on happiness, and assert that all it means is present gratification ; they take truth, and confound it with expediency, or mere convenience ; they speak of life, and say that it is only a worldly thing, and all its interests lie between the cradle and the grave.

Such lives fail, because they have lost the true principle of progress. O brothers—

“ hold it truth with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers tones,
That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead souls to higher things.”

O Jesus, true Son of Man, teach us to-day the meaning of Thy cry, “ *My God, My God*, why hast Thou forsaken Me ? ” Thy faith failed not, though feeling was all against it. Thy faith in God never wavered in the darkness. Thy sinking heart held on by the deepest principle of human life, “ I come to do Thy Will, O God.” The clouds rolled on,

and the storm swept over Thee, Thou didst bow Thine Head in meekness and obedience—even unto death—and the fruits of those hours of patient self-sacrifice, what are they now? O my Redeemer, who hast “power on earth to forgive sins,” who hast ascended up on high, and dost give heavenly gifts to men, who art exalted to the Father’s Throne,

“ The Head that once was crowned with thorns
Is crowned with glory now :
A royal diadem adorns
The Mighty Victor’s brow.”

Further, there are different ways in which men walk in darkness.

There are those who pass onward through life, justifying themselves by some easy standard of human respectability—respectable in their personal conduct, respectable in their dealings with society, respectable in their observances of religion—as the world goes. And yet they walk in darkness—no realization of the dazzling purity of God, no realization of “walking in the light” of fellowship with Him,—consequently, no consciousness that under

the cover of all that respectability every page of the history of life is spotted and stained with imperfection. Judgment is drawing nearer, when the books will be opened. Yet the soul is comfortable in the death-sleep of its mere respectability. Oh ! for a voice through which God speaks ! It needs to be awakened.

Awakened ! Light enters it—the Light of God. The soul sinks into the distance, and O how great the contrast ! Respectability is gone. Another conviction brings the prayer to the lips, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” It is led to the Cross and to the Precious Blood.

Light steals down from heaven—O how pure in its unearthly beauty, this Light of God !—And the soul longs to walk in the light. Clouds, now seeming dark and terrible in contrast with the light, cross the path and pass away, and the life is lived in that strength of humility which comes from faith and hope going hand in hand with penitence and prayer. The beatitude is possible now, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God.”

Again, there are those who travel along life's

journey consciously walking in darkness, and yet come not to the light. Sometimes, startled by sudden warning as an angel of death hovers near, there is a half resolve to seek the unseen things which are eternal. The fear passes, and the soul recovers its wonted calmness of inaction, and goes on as before.

What is the secret of this indecision of the will? It may be the bondage of some sinful habit where the soul secretly loves its sin. "Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." Indulgence in sin forms a habit which twines itself like a soft silken cord round the life, and then turns its bands to fetters of iron, which none but God can break.

It may be some act of wrong done in the past, which is continually rising even through the mist of years, and gathers like a black cloud between the soul and its God; and life is lived under the conscious blight of its shadow. Yet to put that wrong right, to confess that sin, would involve shame, and the soul holds back. Ah! again, men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

It may be—well? there are other ways in which

men walk in darkness, for the ways of sin are many. It may even be that the soul would hide itself from itself, and dare not think.

And under cover of the night-clouds, spirits of the Evil One draw near unseen, and whisper, "not yet ! the pulse beats high and the world is bright, there are many chances yet ; ' yea ! hath God said ? Ye shall not surely die.' " Or again, they whisper of the changeless love of the Eternal. " Take thy fling in the world, O soul, the fountain for sin's cleansing is open ever—any time for thee. Let the claim of the Redeemer's love wait. Love that has borne such wounds will bear to be wounded more. Though His Heart break, let Jesus wait, till the world has faded and the taste for its pleasures is gone—and the lights of life are low—and then make a convenience of His Cross, go and kneel, and tell Him thou lovest Him for the sake of His Cross—if thou canst ! "

Would you listen to the Tempter ? No ! brothers, it would be too mean—too ungenerous !

Blessed Redeemer, Thou hast been tempted in Thy Passion, save us ever from yielding to thoughts like these !

There was not only the agony of Divine forsaking, but also the last desperate struggle with the powers of evil. The three hours were spent almost to the end in mysterious silence as well as gloom. What was going on?

He entered into the darkness, for He was made sin. And who shall say what Powers of Darkness drew near to torment, with fiendish suggestions, the soul already pressed down by intense bodily suffering? Who shall say how the Cross was made a dread battle-field, as the stronghold of the purpose of the Redeemer's Will was stormed by the concentrated forces of evil?

O Incarnate Crucified, strong in Thy purpose of Redemption because filled with the Love of God, Thou didst sink into the darkness which was the darkness of Divine forsaking, and the darkness of the powers of evil assaulting Thy soul, that Thou mightest lift us from its shadows and from its dangers into the Light of Thy Life and Love!

Once more. One hour of darkness awaits us all, the night-fall of the natural life. Whatever else we may escape, this will come. It is strange and

mysterious. We shrink from contact with death, because it is unnatural. We were not made to die.

It may seem to come kindly, as to most men ; it will not be the less serious, because it is final. Over the eye darkening mists will fall, and shut out the dear faces we know so well. Over the ear will come a stillness, and loving words from hearts of love will be lost. The hand may fall nerveless and cold in the hand of a friend. All, all will be left behind, as we go forth to cross the boundary—alone. O God, not alone, since Jesus has died—not alone in that hour of utter weakness, in that mysterious borderland—not alone, if in union with Christ.

To lean upon His Cross and feel not the weight of sin, to lean upon His prevailing intercession when too weak to pray, to lean upon His life within the soul—this is not loneliness, nor is it death !

“ Leaning on Thee,
Blessed Jesus, no fear alarms,
Calmly I stand on death's dark brink,
I feel the everlasting Arms,—
I cannot sink.”

Prepare for this. Yes ! even if thou hast not yet taken the first step, O take it now. Examine the history of thy life in the light of God's commandments, they are the expression of His Will. Find out thy sins, that thou mayest find their forgiveness. God will help Thee. As thou thinkest upon the darkness of the Son of Man, kneel and pray earnestly, persistently, "O God, give me Thy Holy Spirit to shew me what I am, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

Fifth Word.

"I THIRST."

WHY should it be thought strange to speak of "finding peace with God?"

When two hearts are reconciled and the friction of discord is gone, when the separating cause is put away, and those hearts beat together in the unison of love, there is peace.

Between the Heart of the Eternal, unchangeable in perfect goodness, and the heart of humanity, the separating cause of sin has come in, bringing friction and discord into life.

We turn to the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," and read the revelation of the Cross—Jesus is our Peace, for He died to make peace by putting away the separating cause of sin. He is our Peace, for He brings life and immortality to light, and so stills the needs of the human soul.

Again, peace between two hearts involves fellowship, and a fruit of fellowship is knowledge. Hence speaks our Lord, "This is life eternal that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." Eternal life, then, is a life of peace of soul, for it rests on fellowship; it is the soul *en rapport* with God.

But to know God is more than to know about God.

We may have read the history of past ages, and may know about the men who have lived, and acted, and died. We may go over the scenes of their lives, and realize how they lived, and what they were. But we never knew them. They come before us as figures of history, nothing more.

So we may think of the Incarnate. We may trace the history of the Sacred Life from the manger of Bethlehem, to Calvary, and the garden-tomb. We may have learned to hold in orthodoxy its theological teachings—we may recite our Creed with perfect correctness; and yet not know Him.

Brothers, there are those we have known in life, with the knowledge which comes from converse of

soul with soul—the warmth of their affections lingers over us like the after-glow of a summer sunset, their thoughts remain written on the memory with a living power. They may be—not dead to us,—but vanished, and knowledge remains. They come to us in our dreams, they seem to touch us from out eternity, they influence us still. There was something in the glance of the eye, in the tone of the voice, in the touch of the hand, in the sound of the footstep, that made them more than mere figures of history could ever be. We knew them.

So with knowledge of God. To know about Him is possible without any fellowship at all. But to know Him—to have fellowship with Him—to realize the unseen, and to look with the soul's gaze upon light fairer than that which shines on sky or sea, to feel a motive which is ever drawing us upward, to be stirred in the depths of the heart by a love stronger and more tender than any human affection—to have learned to hate sin because of what it is, and to understand the unearthly beauty of purity and heavenly love,—this can only be ours when the clouds of sin are scattered from the soul, and

its deadening influences removed, through the power of the Precious Blood.

To have "peace with God," then, means more than to believe that the guilt of the past is atoned for in the Passion of the Redeemer. It means to be in sympathy with principles of life which exist in, and come from, God.

We are created with a capacity for this, and it is often experienced as a law of human life in what men sometimes call, without tracing it to its source, the "gladness of heroism."

"When, in a time of perplexity and temptation, you say, 'I will do the right thing, then, let come on what may,' what is the secret of the strange stern joy you feel? When, in painful doubt, you say to timid teachers, 'Do not talk of safety and prudence, tell us only the truth,' what is the inspiration of your strong desire? When you have for once, in secret and unpraised, made an unreserved sacrifice of yourself for a cause that has touched your hearts, what was the balm that dropped into your soul, and made a holier place than you had ever known? I am persuaded that were it not incongruous even to think

of self-scrutiny in such exalted moments, you would feel that the secret of this spiritual glory was a sense of oneness with an order grander than material laws, with an all-pervading life in which for ever all is well, with an all-embracing love, to be at one with which, is the heart's final joy."*

Have you known times when the soul has made you feel its dissatisfaction with the imperfection of things round it, and with the incompleteness of life itself here, when you have strained the eye, as it were, to look into the unseen, and apply methods of investigation that are limited to this world, to solve the mysteries which lie beyond, and have felt beaten back in weariness upon yourself? Have you then come to think there must be some means of knowing where such infinite interests lie? and the words have come, as from lips speaking in love from the unseen, "Spiritual things are spiritually discerned." One thing you learn, namely, the consciousness of a want which nothing material will satisfy. Why is that want yours?

Oh! if you have known the unrest of soul which

* "New Theories and the Old Faiths," p. 40.

has come because you have turned away from, and would not have, Him who is the soul's only Rest ; and now the dark past is ever rising before you when your heart would turn to God. If you have known the dreariness, the depression of walking in darkness,—or more, even the agony, almost of despair, of consciousness of being lost,—and then have, by chance perhaps, as we say, entered a Church and listened to the sweetness of some hymn that has grown dear to the heart of Christendom through successive ages ;

“ Jesu, the hope of souls forlorn,
How good to them for sin that mourn,
To them that seek Thee, Oh how kind,
But what art Thou to them that find.

No tongue of mortal can express,
No pen can write the blessedness,
He only who hath proved it knows
What bliss from love of Jesus flows.”

What has been the thrill of eagerness which has passed through your soul ? Like the Man of Sorrows, who tasted the darkness,—Oh ! how bitterly—upon the Cross, when the first faint light began to come

through the gloom, and the darkness of sin began to weigh less heavily on His soul, because sin was dissolving into nothingness—like Him, you cry, “I thirst.”

There is a strange, vague longing. Shall we try to put it into words? “I care nothing about theological questions; I am weary of religious controversy—I want God; and knowing Him, to love Him, and loving Him, to live in His Presence. Jesus, speak to me in love!”

Let us turn then to the revelation of the word, “I thirst.”

For three hours the darkness lay around the Cross, and its shadows fell far and wide. What passed with the Sin Bearer is shrouded in mystery. It was the “power of darkness.” One thing we know: He hung in silence, until, near the end of the three hours, one sharp cry pierces the gloom. “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

This was a human cry. The Divine Redeemer at this stage of His Work became especially the Representative of humanity, and took the sinner’s place.

It reveals the consequences of sin, namely, a consciousness of Divine forsaking—a sense of being separated from God. What wrung the cry from Him? Was it utter weariness after the three long hours of intense suffering? What was it, if not that then the powers of Hell made one supreme effort, one last assault upon His Soul? Remember, it is a spiritual agony He speaks of in that cry.

A few minutes only perhaps elapsed, and there is another utterance: "I thirst." Again, this is a simple human cry. It expresses the physical want of a suffering human being. "I am thirsty." The very words of Jesus may be lisped by a fevered, sick child, they may fall from the parched lips of a wounded soldier, as he lies on a battle-field, they may express the simple longing of a man worn out by excessive toil.

The first three words from the Cross are the utterance of a Divine Intercessor—Jesus speaks as the Divine Redeemer—the last four are the expression of a human experience—Jesus speaks as the Sin Bearer—the Son of Man in contact with sin. During the three hours of darkness, and in the cry

at its close, can be traced no expression of a sense of physical suffering. Such indeed there must have been, but it was forgotten in the more intense anguish of soul. This is a human law.

When the mind is absorbed in the shock of some great crisis, when the heart's affection is strained under intense sympathy at the bedside of some sick, suffering friend, and a life dearer than one's own is trembling in the balance, then is forgetfulness of self.

"All that is neuralgic, all that is acute in physical consciousness, will come *after* the great mental strain, and not at the time of it." *

So in the Passion of Calvary. When the great spiritual crisis is over, and the intensity of mental anguish is ceasing, then comes the recollection of the burning, fevered pain, and the one word is heard, "I am thirsty."†

Again, when from the night of transfiguration, Jesus goes forth to the work of atonement, "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." There was an unearthliness of purpose about Him, that His disciples followed Him at a distance.

* "Voices from Calvary." † "Διψῶ."

What was the secret? "I have a baptism to be baptised with: and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" Before Him loomed the stupendous work of the world's redemption. Upon that the whole purpose of His life was now fixed, and its possession of Him increases until it culminates in the cry of supreme agony—the *central* cry of the Seven—the cry which reveals the crisis of the Passion. After that there is a pause. The dread work anticipated through long ages—yes! from all eternity in Divine foreknowledge—which only the Love of the Eternal was strong enough to undertake, was done. The Sacred Life of cross-bearing, for, as one has beautifully said, "The Manger of Bethlehem was the incipient cross, which took its last death-form on Calvary,"*—had reached its climax, and the victory of Divine Grace over the powers of Evil was gained. The toil of the life of humiliation was over. Sin was put away—atoned for—the darkness was lifting, and the day-dawn was coming back upon the soul. There was time to think of a physical want. "I am thirsty."

* Prayer Book Unveiled, p. 282.

The relief, then, from the soul-darkness, the sense of being lost in eclipse from God, lies in the remission of sins. When sin is taken away, the darkness it causes also disappears. So we read of the Divine purpose of the work of S. John Baptist, that it was "to give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of sins."

Another truth is indicated in the response to the Saviour's cry of human distress, "I thirst." One, standing near, moved by a kindly feeling, in pity ran and filled a sponge with the sour wine of the Roman soldiers, and placing it upon the stem of a hyssop-plant, held it to His lips.

So when the grace of the Holy Spirit has been striving, and the conviction of sin has come, when the soul has seen what it is in the light of the purity of God, and the thought of a wasted life, or of a sin-stained past weighs heavily upon the heart, and the countenance is sad ; then alas ! too often kindly friends in haste draw near, and offer the sour wine of worldly pleasures to quench that thirst of soul.

Mistaken kindness !—nay, sometimes worse—the officiousness of spiritual ignorance ! That

sense of want is the yearning of an orphan for the Father and His love. It is like the "hart panting after the water-brooks." It is soul-thirst for God !

Brother, if thou shouldest meet with such, speak to them—tenderly, reverently of Jesus and His love. Tell them, if thou canst, how thou hast a quiet conscience because thou knowest thy sins are forgiven thee. Lead them to Calvary, and if thou canst not teach, at least let them have the sympathy of thy earnest prayer.

Once more, and I have done. How shall the light be found ?

Seek it, and you shall find it, at the Cross—but oh ! I beseech you, seek it according to the revelation of the Cross.

Do not single out just the revelation of one of these blessed Seven Words and ignore the rest. Do not fix your eye upon that wondrous proclamation, "It is finished," and say, "this shall be my Gospel, and I will hold as meaningless everything else." Salvation is far more than the mere forgiveness of the guilt of the past : there must be fitness for heaven.

Follow the Son of Man—He is the Captain of your salvation—every step of the way. See what sin means. Look at its revelation in the darkness. Have you conviction of sin? Then listen, He speaks again. “I thirst.” Do you thirst for the water of eternal life? How shall it be revealed?

The light of the stream of spiritual life broke again over the soul of the Redeemer when the blackness, which had intercepted it, was cleared away.

So it is with us. There need be no thought as to whether or not the blessed gift will come. Come it will, for the Incarnate has lived and died and risen again, and is at the Throne. The question is rather, am I keeping it away? Am I hindering its working?

There must be freedom from the darkening shadow, the paralyzing influence of indwelling sin. There must be a true repentance, and repentance is that whereby we forsake sin. It is that confession of sin which expresses itself in the language of action—the action of renouncing it—repudiating it—casting it out from the secret chambers of the soul—fighting persistently against it. Prepare the way of the Lord of Life by a true repentance. God will help you, brothers.

There must be that apprehension of the reality of sin, which expresses itself in its confession to God. It is the acknowledgment of the necessity of Divine grace to effect the sinner's restoration.

Again, because the future life is one of purity, truth, and goodness—a life of righteousness. Divine grace or life is given to us here in order to prepare us for it—to be within the being “like leaven hidden in three measures of meal till the whole be leavened.” But His grace requires the co-operation of the human will, so that “we work out our salvation” while it is “God that worketh in us.” Hence the revelation of grace and the realization of peace with God is mercifully withheld until the will has risen to the resolve to do what is right at whatever cost, to “bring forth fruits meet for repentance.” If, therefore, some wrong has been done, under which one is suffering, and which can be put right, *restitution* is a condition of the realization of peace.

Thirdly, there must be a forgiving heart. The future life is one of love—that holy, heavenly love—which was introduced into the world by the Incarnate, and then first named “Charity.” This grace is

bound up with eternal life. S. John says, "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." It is easy to have it as a mere sentiment, to have some sweetness of soul when all goes well, and friends are kind; but when a wrong has been done to us, and our tenderest susceptibilities have been wounded, and the pain of injustice has been keen; then to forgive—to forgive, and feel no lingering resentment half re-asserting itself—to forgive, and remember the wrong only with a feeling of tender regret. This *forgiveness* is the fruit of "holy, heavenly love." It is a test of its reality.

Hence our Lord's words of serious caution—"And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him, so likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

Oh! brothers, shrink not from these conditions. They are the conditions supplied by the co-operation of thy will upon which the indwelling grace of God can build up the character of thy Lord. What was more splendid in His Sacred Life than its righteous-

ness, its dazzling purity, its unswerving truthfulness, its heroic adherence to principle? How beautiful in Him was the delicate tenderness, the strong devotion—of holy, heavenly Love! And Christ must be formed in thee.

Brothers, let us kneel before the Crucified to-day. O my Redeemer, I have dared to look upon the darkness about Thy Cross and to listen to Thy cry. Look upon me from Thy Throne, and in mercy help me. Dost Thou see in me true repentance? Is there any work of restitution which Thou art waiting for me to do? Is there any one I have yet to forgive?

“Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart: prove me and examine my thoughts: look well if there be any way of wickedness in me: and lead me in the way everlasting:” for my soul is athirst for Thee.

Sixth Word.

"IT IS FINISHED."

SING, O Heavens, and rejoice, O Earth, for "the Lord hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea!"

The long anticipated work is accomplished, and humanity is redeemed. The life of sacred toil, which deepened into the Mystery of the Passion, is closing now. The tyranny of sin and death is broken by the victory of patient suffering upon the battle-field of the Cross.

Through long ages the curse of sin had lain upon the human race, and the shadows of suffering and sorrow had settled down upon its life. And there was unrest of conscience. The instinct of sacrifice for sin ran like a scarlet thread through the superstitions of the heathen world, while in the chosen nation, it was guided to teach the truth from which

it sprang. And over all, the Heart of the Eternal was yearning with a changeless love. The Father so loved the world that He gave the Son : the Son so loved the world that He gave His Life. "In the fulness of time," the Incarnate was born. He took His stand at the head of the human family, and in the eloquence of the actings of His Sacred Life, pleaded for them with the Eternal Father. "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a Body hast Thou prepared Me : lo ! I come to do Thy Will, O God. These, My brethren, have cut themselves off from life eternal by the disobedience of sin : Mine shall be a life of sinless obedience before Thee : in Me humanity shall live a righteous life before its God."

Gaze, brothers, upon the sinless life of Jesus. He trod the path we all must tread from the cradle to the grave, entering into each phase, and traversing each department, of a true human life ; ennobling each with the sanction of His sinless discharge of ordinary duties. From first to last His was a life of perfect obedience to the Will of God, as the true law of human existence.

Humanity was without sin in the Incarnate, and He brought "life and immortality to light" for mankind, who should become members of His righteous Person.

From Jesus, the true Vine, life flows to the Church: and shall flow as successive generations come and go. The righteous service of that perfect human Life shall justify many; and the sin-bearing unto death of that Sinless One shall bring to many the benediction of forgiveness. Hearts "looking unto" Him are thrilled with the joy of Divine acceptance, and lips touched with the Precious Blood sing in the hymns of the Church the triumphs of His Redeeming grace.

"Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness
My beauty are, and glorious dress.
When from the dust of death I rise,
To claim my mansion in the skies.
Even then shall this be all my plea,
Jesus hath lived and died for me."

But when we look beyond the conditions of the present, and when we try to realize the greatness of the Heavenly life, the dignity of its position in the

universe, the grandeur of its service, the dazzling purity of its holiness, the sweetness of its love, we are struck with the vast gulf which lies between what we are intended to be there, and what we are in reality here. To bridge over this mighty chasm there is salvation. What is it ?

Some have regarded the distance to be so hopeless that they prefer to shelve the whole question of fitness for Heaven, and to take their chance, or what may be the future possibilities of the Almighty love of God. They forget, however, that a Perfect Being is limited by the fact of His own perfection, and therefore the love of God acts, so to speak, in accordance with the laws of His own Perfect Being.

Others have seen the standard of life, even in the Church, to be so low ; they have found everywhere principles permeating the systems of social and religious life, which will not bear the light of the Truth, and they have felt the tide of worldliness to be so strong, that they have virtually separated faith from life, and limited salvation to the forgiveness of sins. Their ingenious "scheme of salvation" is, that a man may be slothful and self-indulgent, may give the rein

to passion and ambition in this life ; in a word, may live for the world, so long as he contrives to make his interest in the Blood of the Redeemer a faith-investment in insurance against final punishment. Such a conception of the meaning of salvation degrades the soul which entertains it, and is a libel upon the Work of the Redeemer.

Then what is salvation ? It is to receive the gift of spiritual life from God in receiving Christ—to receive Him by purifying the soul by a true repentance from sin, by opening the heart to the light of His Spirit and the warmth of His love, by laying down the keys of the citadel of the being at His Feet in the surrender of His Will—to receive Him in a conscious realization of the spiritual life which has been supernaturally implanted : so that regeneration from above issues in the new birth of Divine life within the soul. And then it is for all this to be sustained.

It is to have the motive for it all, in being possessed by a deep, strong, love for God, as the governing principle of life.

It is to remember that there is one thing which

we cannot touch, and the removal of which is a necessary condition of all else : and this is *sin*. The guilt of what is done wrong leaves the present in which life moves and remains fixed in the acted past. It is deposited, so to speak, in the ever-accumulating history of life, and gathers like a darkening cloud between the soul and God.

It is to remember, too, that the Incarnate went to the Cross to clear away this "thick cloud of our transgressions." "Christ died for our sins." "He led captivity captive," and then "gave gifts to men."

So is it ever. The grace of spiritual life is not independent of the forgiveness of sins. This is one of the great practical truths the Church teaches. She bids her children come to the Holy Communion, but to come with a "quiet conscience;" and over the qualifications of repentance and faith she throws the charm of a thankful remembrance of the Saviour's Death and Passion.

This is the revelation upon which we look in the Sixth Word from the Cross.

The darkness of conviction of sin leads on to the

thirst for God, in the intensity of which the soul turns away from everything which keeps it back from fellowship with Him. The next step is the revelation of the Redeemer's "finished work." For repentance cannot touch the guilt of past years, or even of yesterday, because the past which has gone from us cannot be lived over again.

"It is finished." The word which fell from the lips of the Redeemer was "It is accomplished." It was a word which He had used before. "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." "Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished ; for He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked and spitefully entreated, and spitted on ; and they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death, and the third day He shall rise again." "I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in Me." He from whom the Holy Ghost proceeded, by whose inspiration prophecy was given, knew the work which lay before Him, of which they wrote. In the

humiliation of the Manger of Bethlehem it began to be realized. It deepened through the Sacred Life. It culminated in the mysterious agony revealed in the central cry from the Cross. His humanity had learned the hardest lesson of subjection to God ; it was perfected through suffering. And now as the human heart was literally breaking, and the death mists were gathering, as the natural life was closing, and its sacred toil was over, the appointed work, so long looked forward to, was accomplished, and the redemption of mankind was a fact.

“ It is finished.” As, reverently, but with intense interest, we watch the crisis, another meaning is recognised in this utterance.

The fourth word reveals the agony of a soul in darkness. Sin laid on Him caused spiritual darkness, and this was supernaturally manifested in a physical phenomenon, as the evidence of its reality (shall we not believe it?) for our sakes. Then the fifth word is the expression of a thought of Himself rather than of the struggle in which He had been engaged. Why? The intensity of the spiritual

and mental strain is over. Spiritual light is returning to His soul, and the shadows begin to be less dense about the Cross. He understands the meaning of the change—"Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished," said, "I thirst." And immediately afterwards, as the heart breaks, there comes what is at once the loud cry of sudden sharp pain and the expression of intense spiritual relief—"It is finished." The darkness is gone. The light of the Father's countenance has come back in the return of conscious fellowship. Why? Because *sin is swept away*, which caused the darkness of eclipse from God. Thus in the demonstration of the details of the Passion, proof is given of the fact of the Atonement.

"It is finished." Again, we ask is there another revelation for us in these words coming from the depths of the Redeemer's soul? There is. The battle of the Sacred Life is over. He came down from Heaven and took His place, as Son of Man among the sons of men, on the side of righteousness, truth, purity. The current of human life was against

Him. Like some lonely rock on the sea-shore, upon which the surging waves of the fast flowing tide beat and break, but fail to move. So the steadfast example of His perfect life met the shock of the contradiction of the sinful world; and the human life of the Prince of Peace was that of the Man of Sorrows.

But underlying the hatred of the Pharisees, the growing dislike of the multitude, the treachery of a disciple, was the unseen influence of the Evil One. Jesus joined issue with the spiritual enemy of mankind upon the Cross, and round Him swept the Powers of Hell. He overcame them by "the Power of His Blood and the testimony of His obedience." The spiritual battle is over: the victory is won—and won for us. *The power of victory is accomplished.*

Brothers, when the waves of temptation rise and surge round us: when the resolve of years seems to falter and to be ready to fail before some fierce assault of the devil through the lusts of flesh, or through the allurements of the world, let us pray to Him: He can give us the victory, who won it for mankind upon the Cross.

The fact of the Atonement is demonstrated in the Passion. On this fact rest two things. First, the Redeemer won for Himself a power which He exercises still—the High Priest pleads His finished work in perpetual Intercession at the Throne, and “the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.” Secondly, when a man has grasped the truth of the Cross, he comes, in the strength of that conviction, to seek the power of the Precious Blood. It is just as true, that a man can only come and, by penitent confession, lay down the burden of his sins at the Cross, when he believes it to have been the battle-field on which remission of sins was won for him, as it is true that he who comes to God must first believe that God is.

O brother, believe to-day in the fact of Calvary : believe in the finished work of thy Redeemer—finished, for thee. I ask thee not merely to accept the true word of God, which proclaims His redeeming work of love for thee, but look, the actings of the Passion witness to thee that the work is done. The fact verifies the Word. Who can contemplate the Passion of Jesus and not read in the wound-

prints of the Crucified the forgiveness of sins?
Who can catch the revelation of the Seven Words
and not reply

“ I do believe, I will believe,
That Jesus died for me ;
And on the Cross He shed His Blood,
From sin to set me free ” ?

The soul needs this belief in the fact, not, indeed, to stop short here and say, “ I believe I am forgiven, and therefore I am,” but in the power of this belief—O soul, go and kneel in penitence before thy Saviour. Confess thy sins “ with full purpose of amendment,” and then through faith let forgiveness bring gladness to thy soul. Listen to S. John : If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

Nay ! if thou hast not yet been baptised—“ Arise, and be baptised, and wash away thy sins,” and know also that thou art baptised *into* Christ. Does some one ask, is this necessary ? Will not simple faith be enough ? I reply, “ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou *shalt be* saved.” How ? “ He that hath the Son *hath* life.”

“Christ died for our sins,” and I have led you to gaze upon the Atonement as an accomplished fact. It is, however, a fact external to yourself, and you may say, “The forgiveness of past sins comes far short of what I need for entrance into a state of salvation, unless I can gain some power that will deal with sinfulness within the heart. The blotted leaves of the history of life made clean and white, is something, but

‘Oh ! for a heart to praise my God,
A heart from sin set free.’”

True, but when our Lord claims the power on earth to forgive sins, He offers as the sign of it, a creative act within the being. “Whether is easier to say, thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say arise and walk. But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins,—Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.” The exercise of the power of healing corresponds with a new creation. Listen again to S. John: “If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

By the removal of sin, the right relationship of the soul to God is restored, and the power of grace becomes active within.*

Once more. "It is finished." Blessed Redeemer, Thy sufferings were drawing to an end. Just a little longer, the strained Limbs, the bleeding Hands and Feet will feel the agony of pain. The Crown of Thorns still wounds the Brow, and the Heart is crushed and breaking. but already the shout of victory has sounded from Thy Lips. The proclamation of Thy finished work comes before the closing of Thy life.

So it is with us. "Here in the body pent" the soul is subject to the conditions it imposes, and just a little longer, "the corruptible body presseth down the soul;" the laws of sin tempt us through its members, and we must be watchful against "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." The burden of weariness and infirmity weighs upon us for a little while, and then the body itself will pass to receive the process of its Redemption.

* See Westcott's Epistles of S. John, p. 39.

Meanwhile, we need to bring the life as it is lived piece by piece, so to speak, to the Precious Blood, for we have a past and we have a future in this life of time. He, who is washed, needs still the washing of the feet, for

“The while I fain would tread the heavenly way,
Evil is ever with me day by day.
Yet on mine ear the gracious tidings fall,
Repent, confess, thou shalt be loosed from all.”

O Blessed Jesus, as we journey onward through this mortal life, we look back upon Thy Passion with thankful remembrance, and we look up to Thee, O Pleading High Priest within the veil, for the benediction of Thy forgiveness.

“Until He come ! meanwhile, when faults arise,
We kneel and plead His wondrous sacrifice ;
He pleads above, the Great High Priest in heaven,
We gain below the peace of sin forgiven.”

Seventh Word.

“FATHER, INTO THY HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT.”

THERE are times when we seem to read the parable of a spiritual truth on the face of nature.

We have known days when the sky is obscured with cloud and storm. Hour by hour gloomy masses of dense mist sweep overhead, and then, at eventide, the heavy pall is lifted in the West. The sun breaks out for a moment, and flashes one parting glory of golden light over the plain, then sinks below the horizon, and is gone.

So passed the life of Jesus to its close. The darkness of soul melted away, and the light of conscious communion with His Heavenly Father came back. The world was redeemed : His work on earth was done : “He bowed His Head, and gave up the ghost.”

And so about the Cross, the clouds seemed to

fall from His Sacred Features. One look, as of the sweetness of Heaven, lighted them for a moment, and then they sank into the pallor and the stillness of death. He was gone.

Similarly, the two last words uttered from the Cross, came close together. With the energy of an intense relief He cried, "It is finished." The oppression of the darkness was gone, and His work accomplished. "Father!" Whom I recognize once more,—whose protective love and tender care I feel again!—"Father, into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit." Like the falling asleep of tired nature, the Sacred Body was resigned to the cold embrace of death, and He went forth into the unseen.

The last utterance from the Cross is a revelation of two distinct facts.

We learn, first, that the result of the removal of sin is the return to the soul of communion with the Heavenly Father. It is the restoration of that right relationship between the Self-Existent and the being dependent upon Him, which is the righteous life of man. It is possible to us, because we are

created in His likeness. It is necessary, for it enables us to have that community of nature which must exist between the Divine Father and the adopted human child of His love. It opens the way for that growth of Godlike character, which is preparation for Heaven. The sin-cleansed soul "walks in the light" during its earthly pilgrimage. In other words, it is under a continual transfiguration as it lives in communion with God.

Sin suspends this light and interrupts its work. O that it could be more borne in mind that the presence of unforgiven sin upon the soul is not only a condition of danger with regard to Hell, because of the uncertainty of life here, but, hour by hour while it lasts, it involves a loss in preparedness for Heaven, because it is paralyzing the grace of God within !

The spiritual education of the soul here cannot be acquired (except by a miracle) in the rapture of a few exalted moments, coming now and then in life. Growth in heavenliness is gained by the steady persistent operation of the grace of God through days and months and years.

The beautiful colour of a flower—delicate in its tenderness, inimitable in its tone—is produced by light—not merely acting in just a few isolated flashes, like summer lightening, which scatters for an instant the shadows of night, and then all is dark as before—but calmly shining through the long hours of each successive summer day. The parable is full of meaning; “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow.”

The restoration of the light of the Father’s countenance to the soul of the Son of Man upon the Cross is revealed in the seventh word. “My God, My God,” are the words uttered in the darkness. They are changed to “Father,” when the eclipse is over.

Secondly, there is revealed the human response to the touch of God. “Into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit.”

Human life is more than the life of a flower, for man has free-will. The flower feels the light and the warmth of the summer sun, and under its influence springs up and grows to maturity. It

cannot help it. It opens its petals to the kiss of the sunshine by a fixed law impressed upon its life by its Creator. No so with man. The love of God may touch his soul with its tender pleading, and spiritual life may circle round him like a sea ; but, just because he has a Will of his own, he can close his soul against it, and turn his back upon it all, and choose to live an unrighteous life—a life wrong in its relationship to God.

O awful mystery, O mighty power of the human Will ! To wield it deliberately against the Will of God, is the root of sin : to bow it down in willing surrender to His Will is the secret of Conversion !

“ Into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit.” These words express the exercise of a human power free to act. In glad recognition of liberty from the oppressive weight of sin, His soul responds to the touch of the Father’s love, by yielding itself to His keeping. The last act of choice—the last exercise of Will as the Sacred Life of human Example closed, was to re-assert, after the shock of taking

away the sin of the world, the central principle of true human life. "Lo ! I come to do Thy Will, O God."—"Father, into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit."

Oh ! brothers, God made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." And out of love to us, He willingly accepted the awfulness, and the shame it involved. But it was "that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." God the Father accounted and treated Christ, in the mystery of that Divine forsaking, as under sin, although in fact He was altogether sinless—that in union with Christ—as members of His righteous Person—we might be accounted righteous before God.

Follow Him in this last act of His human life. Recognize the meaning of His death for sin : believe that He has brought life and immortality to light for thee, O soul : then, bow down thy being before Him, and tell Him, that the purpose and effort of His Life's Power in thee shall have the co-operation of thy human will. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Again, the two last cries from the Cross came close together. They were parts of one revelation. The Passion is a manifestation of the love of God, and the recognition of His love kindles within the soul the human response of love, which leads to surrender of the Will.

O wondrous Mystery of God's elective love in Jesus! for, when He overcame the sharpness of death, He opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. Fixing the soul's gaze upon the wounded Form of the Sinless One, pale and still in the stillness of death, we recognize in the Crucified the forgiveness of sins, as we remember how it is written, "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

But this leads us to grasp a deeper truth. In the Passion of the Redeemer we see revealed the depth and intensity of God's love for us, and also the ultimate purpose of that love. He seems to speak to us through the Cross, "I created thee at the first to be My son; I have redeemed thee from death by laying down My own life for thee; for Mine is

an unchanging love. O my son, give Me thine heart." Appealing to our wills, He pleads with us in the eloquence of the Crucifixion, "Look at My wounded Hands, and Feet, and Side—see what My love for thee hath done. Wilt thou doubt it? Wilt thou pass Me by?" Then, overcome by the silent pleading of that love, we fall conquered at the Cross—"Jesus, I will trust Thee. I cannot longer resist Thy love. Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee."

Thus the victory of the Cross is won in the soul.

How full is the inward satisfaction, and how deep is the repose of a life, notwithstanding its toil and trial, which is thus surrendered to the rule of the Son of God!

The force which leads to surrender is the love of God. To rise above the littleness of love as we see it round us here, to get out of habits of thought, into which the selfishness, the unreality, the insincerity, of the world leads us, and to realize the love of God as it is in the Heart of the Eternal, is to gain the ennobling motive of life, and to be won for Him.

There was kneeling one day in Church, a poor collier lad, some ten or twelve years of age. His hair was rough ; his clothes were worn and ragged ; his feet were bare. His hands were clasped as in prayer,—a sad, wistful look was on his face. I kneeled by his side. “I want to be good,” he said, “I want to belong to the Saviour ; but, I could trust Him if only I could be sure that He loves Me.”

His had been a hard life in the world, poor heart, how shall I convince him of the fact of the love of God? I spoke to him of friends and playmates. “Is there anyone you know, who would, if need be, die for you?” He was silent as I pressed the question. “Is there one you have ever known who, if you had to die, would be willing to die in your stead to save you?” A moment’s silence : and then, with a sweet smile, he looked up and said, “I believe my mother would.”

In that brief pause he had looked back on life, and measured a mother’s love. Perhaps there passed before his mind the vision of her toil late at night, to mend his clothes, or earn to-morrow’s

bread, and convinced of the reality of a mother's love, his heart told him it would be strong unto death.

"Then see what Jesus has done," and I spoke to him of the bleeding Hands and Feet of the Crucified. He bowed his face in his hands, as he said, "I can love Him back again, and trust Him too."

Thus was the victory of the Crucified won in that young heart. So is it ever with us all.

"Oh! the bitter shame and sorrow,
That a time could ever be
When I let the Saviour's pity
Plead in vain, and proudly answered,
'All of self, and none of Thee.'

Yet He found me, I beheld Him
Bleeding on the accursed tree;
Heard Him pray, 'Forgive them, Father,'
And my wistful heart said faintly—
'Some of self, and some of Thee.'

Day by day His tender mercy,
Healing, helping, full and free,
Sweet and strong, and, ah! so patient,
Brought me lower, while I whispered—
'Less of self, and more of Thee.'

“ Higher than the highest heavens,
Deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, Thy love at last hath conquered ;
Grant me now my spirit's longing—
‘ None of self, and all of Thee. ’ ”

Brothers, we have travelled the way of the Cross together : We have dared to gaze upon the mystery of the Passion : We have tried—reverently, I hope, and praying to be guided right—the revelation of the Seven Words—the reconciliation of humanity to God.

A word, and I have done. Why did the Redeemer die ? It was to bring life and immortality to light by the removal of the barrier of sin. It was to unstop the avenues of the soul leading up to God, and so to enable men to live the spiritual life by receiving this life into their souls.

Spiritual life is not a mere sentiment about God : it is a real Spiritual Presence in the soul. It is supernaturally implanted ; for we are “ baptised into Christ,” and the Incarnation is extended to our souls—He in us, and we in Him. It must be consciously realized through faith in Him, in willing surrender of the faculties of the being to His

influence and rule, and in coming back to Him, when a soul has gone astray, in solid conversion. It must be nourished by prayer, and by the teaching of the Word, and strengthened by the Bread of Life.

Also, whilst being transformed by daily renewal, we must aim at being "conformed to the likeness of His death." The three last words were uttered after sin had been conquered on the Cross. Sin has been conquered there for you. Let there be, then, that sustained "thirst" for God which will issue in constant repentance from sin. Let there be that faith in the "finished work" of Jesus that will keep you close to the Precious Blood. Let there be that unflagging yielding of the life to God, that the act of surrender may issue in the realized conversion of every human power to Him.

"Keep yourselves in the love of God." Love makes the soul receptive. Read it, meditate upon it, again and again, in the revelation of the Passion. To be receptive towards God is to be unreceptive towards sin.

Live in faith. He who has committed the keeping of his soul to a faithful Creator, and has resolved to live "looking unto Jesus," must not grow fretful and impatient, if led sometimes through mystery.

" Keep Thou my feet, I do not ask to see
The distant scene, one step enough for me."

It is difficult indeed sometimes to do this : it is seldom very easy For to tread the "narrow way," to live in a state of salvation, and therefore to advance in holiness, is far more than the singing of sweet hymns, or the determined holding fast of the watchword of some text of scripture.

But Thou, O Redeemer, O Son of Man, who hast trod the path before us in the mystery of Thy Passion, will help us now, for Thou knowest what we need, and art touched with the feeling of our infirmities ! The battle may be fierce, the march may seem long for the soldiers of Thy Cross, but, O Captain of our Salvation, Thy banner over us is Love.





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